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NINEPENCE

THEATRE WORLD

Month: Scenes from "Let's Face It" and "The Importance of Being Earnest"



by Sashin

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Edited by Frances Stephens

January, 1943

Over the Footlights

1942 in the London theatre was a puzzling year. The capital was raid-free, all forms of entertainment booming, and yet the number of brand new plays produced was very small indeed.

It has been a year of importations and revivals; some very well worth doing, but many scarcely justifying the enormous amount of work entailed.

Of the new plays that stood their ground three were war plays: *The Morning Star*, *Flare Path* and *Men in Shadow*, the two latter still doing nicely. *Murder Without Crime*, ingenious first play at the Comedy, made an immediate hit, but few others could be called big successes. The year closed with a further two new plays in the shape of Beverley Baxter's *It Happened in September*, and Russell Thorndike's *The House of Jeffreys*.

For the rest we have had some pleasant revivals of old musical favourites in *The Maid of the Mountains*, *Rose Marie*, *Lilac Time* and *The Belle of New York*, but most significant has been the remarkable number of American successes which have come to stay. Drama, comedy and big musicals are equally to our liking: Broadway and Piccadilly Circus seem scarcely a stone's throw apart nowadays! *Watch on the Rhine*, *Claudia*, *Du Barry was a Lady* and *Let's Face It* are still among the big successes in Town, to which we feel confident will be added the recent productions of *The Petrified Forest* and *Arsenic and Old Lace*. All the same it is gratifying to recall that London's longest comedy runs are home products, though *Blithe Spirit* and *Quiet Weekend* have a friendly rival in that most American of comedies, *The Man Who Came to Dinner*.

THERE are many happy memories to carry over into 1943: John Gielgud's brilliant productions of *Macbeth* and *The Importance of being Earnest*; Anton Wal-




brook's moving performance in *Watch on the Rhine*; the irresistible appeal of Pamela Brown as Claudia; Adrienne Allen's sensitive playing in *Flare Path*; and John Mills' convincing Lew in *Men in Shadow*. In lighter vein, Frances Day and Arthur Riscoe's superb fooling in *Du Barry was a Lady* is a most happy memory, and particularly Miss Day's rendering of that lovely bit of nonsense "Katie Went to Haiti"; Bobby Howes' clever piece of miming at the Hippodrome is another, and it will be many a day before we cease to smile in retrospect at Leslie Henson's idea of a Russian commentator in the Saville Theatre show *Fine and Dandy*. This is the moment, too, to reflect with admiration on Richard Hearne's "passing out ceremony" at the Prince's.

THERE is not space to comment here on the magnificent work of the "little theatres" in and near London, such as the Mercury, "Q," Orpheum and Arts Theatres, nor on the contribution—taken perhaps too lightly—of the Sadler's Wells Opera and Ballet, and Robert Atkins' fine rendering of Shakespeare at the Westminster.

WHAT, we wonder, will 1943 bring by way of dramatic achievement? Can we hope for more original work, or have most of our budding young dramatists retired for the duration? The contemporary scene and the problems of the future should provide fruitful material: Peter Ustinov found it so and wrote a brilliant first play in *House of Regrets*. We must not forget, however, that managements as a whole lack the necessary faith in the more controversial plays, thereby discouraging our younger playwrights. There is need of a new outlook if the virility of English drama is to continue unimpaired, and if the theatre is to play its fullest part in the era of reconstruction that lies ahead.

F.S.

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P.602A

New Shows of the Month

"It Happened in September"

THERE is no point in objecting to over-reliance on coincidence in Beverly Baxter's cavalcade of three Septembers, produced at the St. James's Theatre. For the background of contemporary history is plot enough on its own merits, and the superimposed story, which deals with the effect of 1938-1940 events on a handful of fairly representative people, holds no more surprises, revolutions and rehabilitations than many an undramatised family history of these last few years.

The Munich September of 1938 finds our handful safe in their comfortable world of country houses; leisurely afternoons, dinner dresses and family feuds. Sir Alexander Banstead, M.P., stands before Baldwin's portrait and registers a bluff and pompous Britishness that has not always appeared so despicable as it does to present-day audiences. Sweet Aunt Ella may have her doubts as to Alex's importance in the cosmos, but her role is to smooth the ruffled and calm the turbulent, and she remains equal to this task throughout our three Septembers. Her nephew Gerald, Banstead's only child, is an Oxford undergraduate who is devoted to the study and performance of music, and allergic to most of his father's panaceas; he loves Prudence, but she prefers the heel-clicking, sour-mouthed, supple Nazi youth introduced into the family circle by the Hitler-bemused and unanalytical Sir Alexander. As Baldwin's picture gives place to Chamberlain's and his to Churchill's, we see again a fresh version of the familiar story, as the old and powerful are gradually persuaded of their blind folly; the young, entrapped by circumstances they have always half-consciously foreseen, accept the dilemma and do what is expected of them without heroics.

So we hear again those pregnant broadcasts of the times, the recorded voices of Chamberlain, Hitler and Daladier, that first siren, a reproduction of blitz and dog-fight noises, and the quarrels and conversations of bewildered old and young. Captain Grigson, the political agent and Great War veteran, is everybody's repository for complaints or aspirations, and one of the inspired occasions in the play is his knitting-conversation with Aunt Ella while guns blare and bombs fall. So too, perhaps, is Gerald's exposition of the impulse behind the Oxford "King-and-Country" resolution.

The theme of world-regeneration dominates the closing scene, where Prudence insists on becoming engaged to the now

Mixed Relations—Ambassadors, Nov. 26th (Withdrawn Dec. 5th).

It Happened in September—St. James's, Dec. 10th (Withdrawn Dec. 26th).

Holy Isle—Arts, Dec. 14th.

House of Jeffreys—Playhouse, Dec. 15th.

The Petrified Forest—Globe, Dec. 16th.

blind Gerald, an R.A.F. casualty, and the young German, a blustering prisoner, rejects the theme with characteristic energy and does not change his spots.

Eva Moore (Aunt Ella) and Harry Hilliard (Captain Grigson) are refreshingly restful; and the Thompsons (Derek Dare and Joan Kemp-Welch) provide another aspect of normality. The rest of the cast comprises Gordon McLeod (the M.P.), Richard Curnock (Gerald), Anne Firth (Prudence), Lionel Watts (her father), John Nicolson (the Nazi menace), and Maude Lambert (the spirited maid).

E.M.H.

"Holy Isle"

URGENT italics in the programme request the audience to waste no time on profitless probing for this play's meaning. But we think the producer, Alastair Sim, did some profitable probing; we think the Orkney royalty of 500 A.D. (King Norman Shelley and Queen Margareta Scott, otherwise Lot and Margause) are fully aware of all the *nuances* that James Bridie requires of them; and the Queen, at least, is nothing if not meaningful. She knows men, she knows women, she knows her own mind, she knows what she wants; unimpressed by the dignity of religion and the importance of big business (500 A.D. version), undeterred by fear of seasickness or of a loss of queenly dignity, she travels as cabin-boy to the unexplored and unexploited island of Ru-Rhush, and a by no means meaningless interaction of personalities begins with a by no means sterile fusion of ideologies, and a by no means pointless comparison of beliefs and traditions.

She (Vivienne Bennett) is the presiding personality of this unspoiled island, and before the advent of herb beer, mining ventures, bankruptcy procedure and other benefits of a more aged culture, is aided in

(Continued on page 8)



Left: Jane Carr as Countess Wanda. Below: Jimmy Godden as the Prince, Wanda's father, always in debt and right, Bertram Dench as Pinkus, the bailiff, who has just arrived on his unpleasant errand at the Woicinski Castle.

Portrait by Swarbrick Studios.



Above: Another scene from this Eric Maschwitz spectacular musical romance showing centre, Ivor Sheridan as Chopin, who has been engaged by the Prince as music master to the Countess Wanda.

Right: Olga d'Este as Alicja.



Left: Chopin and Wanda sing "The Music Lesson." A charming moment from Act 1 in the Music Room at the Castle. Chopin's music is adapted and arranged throughout by Bernard Grun.

Scenes from **"Waltz Without End"**

Right: The Countess Wanda and Chopin fall in love with each other and plan to marry. *Below:* The delightful Candlelight Ballet, with Daria Luna and the corps de ballet. Dancing is a great feature, with Pola Nirenska, Moira Kennett and Daria Luna as speciality dancers.



Below: The animated scene before the Post Hotel, Warsaw. Later, inside the hotel, Wanda is persuaded, for the sake of his art, not to marry Chopin and accepts instead her admirer, Vladimir (Vernon Kelso) (see bottom left).



Right: The beautiful final scene in the Cathedral at Wanda's wedding. Kneeling at the rail, *right*, are Betty Warren as Zoshia and Eliot Makeham as Ignaz.



ented and Produced by Jack Buchanan, *Waltz Without End*, recently transferred the Lyric from the Cambridge, reached its 100th performance on December 28th.

New Shows of the Month

(Continued from page 5)

her gentle sway by the "Ponderers" Qua, Kwo and Wahwah (Owen Reynolds, A. Bromley Davenport and Charles Doe). To this unsophisticated Paradise comes the man-with-his-head-screwed-on-the-right-way, Grettir Flatface, bent on business exploitation (Arthur Hambling), and Friar Innocence (Herbert Lomas), full of missionary zeal and platitudinous disregard for such spiritual richness as the island may already possess.

Torquil the sailor (Emrys Jones) is a fine caricature of the moderately well-intentioned windbag; but no hand at all at minding the babies of the children of nature Ba and Trika (Richard Attenborough and Mary Horn).

Satire and fantasy are blent and overlaid with pageantry: purple and scarlet and emerald and azure enliven every scene. She's story of an aggressive contest in the achievement of meekness, capping Friar Innocence's unconvincing Adam-and-Eve narration, is sheer delight.

You may have noted that while attributing a meaning to the play, we do not specify. To use a time-worn schoolmaster device—we leave that to your intelligence. Phyllis Morris plays Ku (the island woman) and Lee Fox a "Jarl-in-Waiting." Décor is by Michael Warre. E.M.H.

"House of Jeffreys"

STRANGE things have happened in the City of London in the past, but nothing stranger than the macabre happenings at the House of Jeffreys, publishers, in Bakery Lane. The truth is this story takes a bit of swallowing (unlike, we presume, the delicate morsel that was Roberta Justen), but having achieved that process, there are sufficient thrills to hold the attention and freeze the blood.

Georgina Jeffreys, returned after a lifetime as missionary in the South Seas, to take charge of the family business in the year 1880, is seen to be still under the influence of the notorious Judge Jeffreys, whose portrait dominates the scene throughout. Apparently that influence has haunted Georgina's Jekyll and Hyde personality since childhood, so much so that notwithstanding the hymns and the harmonium it would appear that in this case the cannibals have converted the missionary.

Back in England with Sabbath, faithful black servant from the Islands, Georgina soon invests the already sinister surroundings in Bakery Lane with even grimmer potentialities with the aid of a sliding panel and an outside in ovens. The rest you can no doubt guess. The Judge wins every time, and poor Georgina, having despatched the innocently guilty Sabbath, herself relapses into gibbering insanity.

Sybil Thorndike, great actress that she is, extracts every ounce of drama and meaning from Georgina's complex personality, and Robert Adams as Sabbath gives credence to the story with a most convincing performance. Russell Thorndike, the author of the play, appears as Mr. Sharp, the precise general manager of the firm, who is completely out of his depth in this weird atmosphere of unmentionable rites at the full moon, and there is excellent support from Arthur Pusey, Rosemary Scott, Gwendolyn Gray and Judith Nelmes.

F.S.

"The Petrified Forest"

ROBERT E. SHERWOOD'S outstanding power as a playwright undoubtedly lies in his gift of extracting enthralling entertainment out of the most unlikely material. Philosophy and thrills are not easy bed fellows, but in *The Petrified Forest* they are most happily blended.

There is a salutary reminder of what could very easily happen again in the author's penetrating insight into the world of 1934, that world of lost hopes and a lost generation. When this period of united purpose is over there will be thousands of embryonic Alan Squiers and Duke Mantees in the shadows groping for a faith that somehow must be given them.

The story is by now no doubt familiar to most playgoers. The petrified forest in the Arizona Desert is but a symbol, the unseen background that points the moral to the story of an unfulfilled novelist, a gangster, and the little girl who dreams dreams. The gangster holds up the inmates of a lonely gasoline station-cum-lunch room, and an assorted bunch they are, and in the stress of the moment develops a hint of Judgment Day, and all souls are laid bare to the tune of machine-gun bullets. The second act provides some of the most thrilling moments it has been our lot to experience, notwithstanding the vast amount of talk that adorns the play.

The production is excellent: the acting superb, particularly the performances of Constance Cummings as Gabby, the French-American daughter of the lunch room proprietor, who dreams of France and falls in love with the novelist-philosopher, Alan Squiers, portrayed with great sensitiveness by Owen Nares. And who but Hartley Power could have played Duke Mantee, the gangster, to such perfection. His conversation is monosyllabic, yet he conveys a whole world of meaning with his silences: a really outstanding performance. Special mention should be made, too, of Percy Parsons' performance as Gramp Maple, but in every respect the play is perfectly cast. This is a production not to be missed in any circumstances.

F.S.



(Above): Jerry Walker arrives at the Service Club in his lorry unceremoniously through the wall. Lieutenant Wiggins is none too pleased. L-R: William T. Holland, Bobby Howes, Jack Stanford and Leigh Stafford (as Frankie and Eddie, Jerry's pals). Right: The three girl friends, Winnie Potter (Pat Kirkwood), Jean Blanchard (Pat Leonard) and Muriel McGillicuddy (Zoë Gail).

PICTURES
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Tella

Let's Face It

ANOTHER American musical comes to Town and gets a big reception. Cole Porter's lyrics and music, a lively production in the best George Black manner, and a bevy of talented stars, headed by Bobby Howes, are the chief ingredients. Bobby Howes has the part of his career, and this, his tenth production at the Hippodrome, looks like being his most successful.

The story concerns three young American soldiers and their girl friends, and another trio of couples of more sober years. Of the latter, three bored and jealous wives select

AT THE HIPPODROME

the three soldiers to entertain, what time their husbands are having their own middle-aged fling. Naturally the three girl friends get involved and much happens before this complicated situation is finally cleared up.

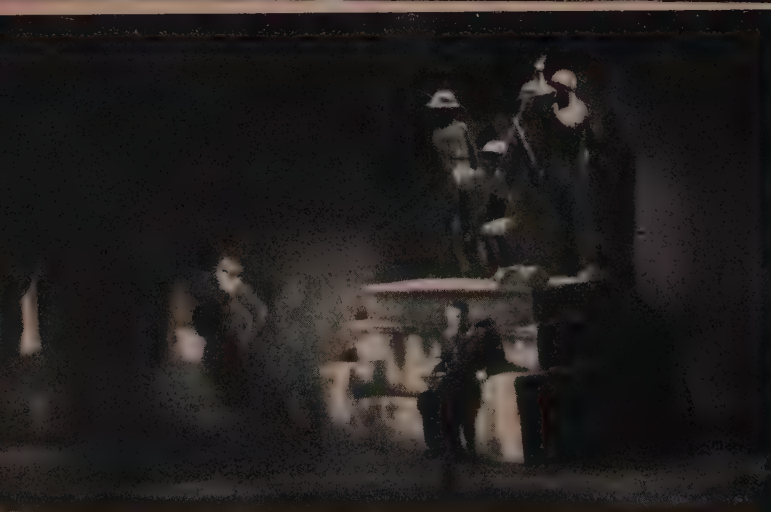
There are many outstandingly funny moments in a production that abounds in good humour, and the songs and dances are put across with verve and skill. The Hippodrome should show "house full" notices for many months to come.



The opening scene at the Alicia Milk Farm, where with the help of Anna, a gym instructor (Rona Riccardo), the not-so-slim go in for strenuous reduction and whither repair Maggie Watson, Nancy Collister and Cornelia Abigail Pigeon, three matrons whose husbands are, much to their chagrin, indulging in some flirtations elsewhere.



At the Service Club at Camp Roosevelt nearby Jerry Walker is surprised by his pals in possession of the one-hundred dollars he so sorely needs to expedite his marriage to glamorous Winnie Potter, who works at the Milk Farm. With some misgivings Eddie and Frankie agree to share Jerry's undertaking to spend the week-end at Mrs. Watson's summer house in return for like money: the three ladies having hit on this idea in a spirit of marital revenge.



In a part of the Parade Ground our heroes foregather and when later they are surprised by Lieutenant Wiggins and Winnie they leap on to the pedestal and join the group of statuary with some hilarious results.



Maggie Watson (Joyce Barbour) makes overtures to the scared and uncomfortable Jerry. But this is nothing to his discomfort when Winnie—wise to the whole scheme—arrives at Mrs. Watson's Summer Home by special invitation. The tables are turned, for the three girls thereafter plan to lure the three husbands by way of counterblast.



Nancy Collister surprises her husband making merry with Jean, while Winnie and Muriel are discovered likewise with the other erring husbands. The indignation of the wives is hardly justified in view of the presence of the three young men; and with all twelve protagonists together complications follow fast and furious. (L-R: Hubert Ennor, Pat Leonard, Noele Gordon, John Clifford and Pat Kirkwood.)



(Left): An ugly moment for Jerry when, accoutred in some borrowed plumes, he is confronted by an angry husband.



A charming interlude in which Halama and Konarski entertain with a brilliant dance. Speed and colour are among the great attractions of the show, and in addition there are Vincent Tildsley's Master Singers and the Radio Three to put over the snappy Cole Porter tunes with the aid of Debroy Somers and his orchestra.



(Right): Halama as she appears later in the remarkable specialty dance which accompanies the "I'm Taking My Steppes to Russia" number in The Lucky Horseshoe Inn scene in Act II.



•Eddie and Frankie with Nancy and Cornelia (Noele Gordon and Babette O'Deal) at the Boathouse at the Lucky Horseshoe Inn, where the young men find it none too easy to cope with their skittish partners, particularly Jerry, who has whisked Maggie off in a boat.



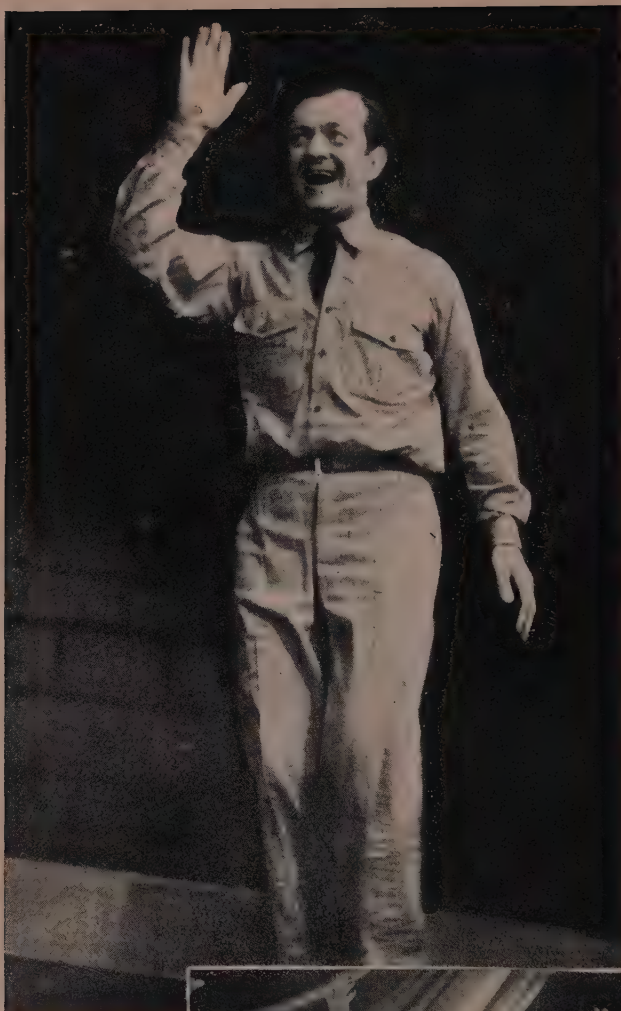
(Left):
Frankie Burns (Jack Stanford) entertains with a dance.



Back Stage at the Service Club, after their return from the week-end adventures, Jerry and his pals find themselves roped in for the camp entertainment. *Above:* They rehearse as members of the chorus.



Right: Another view of Jerry shaking the light fantastic toe.



(Left): Highlight of the production is Bobby Howes' dumb show portraying the life of a soldier from the day he enlists to the proud day he is decorated; a delicious piece of miming that covers the whole gamut of army life from medical to manoeuvres.



(Right): All matrimonial and other differences happily settled, the company line up for the final curtain.

Bellona's Blessings

by Eric Johns

IT was down in Diana Wynyard's dressing-room at the Aldwych that I first came face to face with the naked truth: that times have changed in the theatre.

The room was familiar. Some six years previously Hilda Trevelyan had entertained me in that same cosy den below the Drury Lane pavement, where I listened enthralled for three memorable hours between shows while she related the romance of creating her incomparable "Wendy" in the original production of *Peter Pan*.

Those leisurely days of "between-shows" gossip are gone, now that the curtain is up by six in the evening. On Diana's matinee days only sixty minutes elapse between the end of one show and the beginning of the next—just one crowded hour for her to snatch some refreshment, take a little rest, and renew her make-up for the evening performance.

Yet there was no fluster or bustle below stairs at the Aldwych. The peaceful room looked much as it had done in Hilda Trevelyan's time. Diana had shed the characteristic "hausfrau" blouse and skirt which she wears as the heroine of *Watch on the Rhine* and greeted me in a Regency dressing-gown striped in pink and white, which transformed her into a radiant Jane Austen heroine on the threshold of glorious young womanhood.

"Forgive me for not wasting words," she said with a melting smile, "but time is precious between shows. On matinee days almost every minute is scheduled; it's about one o'clock when I arrive at the theatre and getting on for nine-thirty before I'm out again."

"In other words," I suggested, "it's about as grim as non-stop revue. Don't you hate it?"

"Not really," replied Diana, adding with a graceful shrug of the shoulders, "it's just a sign of the times and goes to show that the war has brought about a revolution in the theatre, but like bus queues and the removal of Hyde Park railings, I'm quite convinced that many of these new ideas have come to stay. Some may even be blessings in disguise and will still be with us after the Peace."

The war has brought genuine blessings to the theatre. Although the earlier start has robbed the house of its former glitter and caused many playgoers to regret the passing of the finery, I doubt if there will be a popular demand for the return of the old 8.30 curtain after the war.

Only people of leisure have time to dress for the theatre these days when they have

to be in their seats by six o'clock, and there are so few of them that they would look sadly out of place in the stalls, sitting next to men in battle-dress and women in office jumpers. It would tend to brand them as people with too much time on their hands. In consequence, no one dresses at all. War workers have no time, and the others simply fall in with the majority.

I feel the mink coats and diamond tiaras of the old days rather scared a certain section of the public away from the theatre. Fearing they might feel a little shabby and out of place in their one evening gown which often had to serve more than one season, they preferred to turn a cold shoulder on the theatre in favour of the cinema where they could breathe more freely and where there were no intervals.

After all, the interval at the theatre is something of a social function, when you parade the foyer once or twice during the evening in order to enjoy a cigarette and to exchange conversation with your companion. A sensitive and not too well dressed woman would hardly feel at her best on such an occasion, which she might regard rather as an ordeal, with every other member of the fair sex in the house frowning upon her clothes. Such an instance might be an exaggeration, but it would cause the poor playgoer sufficient mental discomfort to make her feel that she had paid rather a heavy price for attending the theatre.

Nowadays it is no longer "an event" to go to a show. Before the war, going to a Cochran revue, a Noel Coward comedy, or the Russian Ballet entailed a certain degree of ritual. It was something like attending the Opera and demanded a good deal of planning and at least a couple of hours of preparation on the actual date. The days have passed when hostesses gave dinner parties for a visit to the theatre and conveyed their guests in cars. The theatre has come off its pedestal and has flung open all its doors to any member of the public who shows a desire to enter. The typist who has only time to powder her nose in that cracked piece of office mirror before tripping over the road to the theatre is just as welcome, even in the stalls, in her utility suit and turban headgear, as was the Dowager Duchess in her ermine cloak and diamond dog-collar in the days before the war.

Theatre-going is becoming more casual and consequently more popular than ever. It is a habit that is rapidly taking a firm hold on sections of the public, who had never seen a play in their lives prior to the

(Continued overleaf)

Bellona's Blessings (Continued)

war. Perhaps they lived far away from the large cities into which one of the Forces or War Work has now transported them. In their limited leisure they have visited the theatre, possibly in the first instance only to see in real life an artist they may have admired on their village screen; but finding the delights of the stage to their taste, they are coming back again and again.

The 8.30 start usually meant that part of the evening was wasted. One often had to kill time between six and eight, and not much could be done after the show when the curtain so rarely came down before eleven. Going to the theatre meant devoting an entire evening in order to see a two-and-a-half hour show.

But now, with the play set in the earlier part of the evening, one is able to do so much more. The curtain rings down by nine, leaving three complete hours before midnight. One can really "do something" with a spell of that length, such as enjoying a leisurely supper, listening to a radio programme, or reading the latest library book. Life is far too short. There is so much to be done to get the best out of it. This earlier theatre-going is a boon in that it gives us so much valuable time later in the evening, when we usually feel at our best, with a haze drawn over the day's work and the thought of a whole night to pass before the toil of another day.

The war is also taking stars out into the Provinces more frequently than they went in the old days. Noel Coward has just been out on a long tour with three plays, two of which have not been seen in Town. He did not play solely in what we theatrical folk call Number One Towns, such as Manchester, Birmingham, and Glasgow; he also chose smaller centres which had probably never seen a West End star or prior-to-London production. They showed their appreciation in no uncertain manner, and I'm convinced that these tremendous receptions that await stars who go into the Provinces are likely to have a favourable reaction on the theatrical profession. It is not good for star actors to play exclusively to the sophisticated audiences of London and New York, with short holidays spent among the idle rich in Monte Carlo or Florida.

A week in Wigan with tripe and onions for supper will teach them something new about audience reaction and how the other half of the world lives. They will return to London richer in experience, with their outlook enlarged, and their artistic vision capable of far deeper penetration.

I've no time for grumblers who maintain the war has only brought misfortune and inconvenience to the theatre. The war has brought its blessings too, and the post-war theatre is going to be all the richer for them.

ECHOES FROM BROADWAY

Below are some notes of current Broadway productions by our American Correspondent E. Mawby Green, whose main article for this month has unfortunately failed to reach us before going to press.

HOWARD LINDSAY, and Russel Crouse whose *Life with Father* and *Arsenic and Old Lace* have been entertaining Broadway for months have now added a third, *Strip for Action*, a title of great promise but small realisation, despite the very large cast and endless attempts to convince you how enormously funny it all is. At times you almost feel the authors straining at the girdle to keep the girls stripping until a new gag comes along. It seems a guy in the army was originally in a burlesque show. Knowing how hungry his buddies are for sight and touch of female form, he arranges for said burlesque show to come down to camp and give a show. In the midst of "taking them off" at rehearsal, the Captain comes along and says you can't do that there here. Whereupon the faces of the men become as thwarted as a twisted G string, meaning something has to be done about it. A quick trip to the War Department in Washington. A big wig there once knew the original queen of strip and he's still sentimental about her. . . . The men are fighting for the women, aren't they? Well, we want to show them what they're fighting for. Permission granted. So the soldiers get their tease, at the end of which they are informed they are leaving for overseas immediately. They march off the stage smiling and satisfied.

Messrs. Lindsay and Crouse have stripped the idea to the bone, and not the funny bone, either, for *Strip for Action* is not the hilarious show they intended and we expected.

* * *

Eric Hatch who wrote *My Man Godfrey* for the films, has taken time off to do a stage comedy, *Little Darling*, which Tom Weatherly has presented with Warner Brothers supplying the backing. It is a typical, uninspired Hollywood tale concerning a writer, a grown-up daughter and an understanding secretary, with the usual complications before he marries the secretary and gets to know his daughter properly. The dialogue probably seemed sensational in Hollywood, but on Broadway for the most part it appeared dull and obvious and unbelievably embarrassing in spots.

* * *

Ronald T. Hammond presented, in what promised to be a series of established Broadway plays, a revival of John Drinkwater's comedy *Bird in Hand*, but since this lasted only one week, this will doubtless be the end of the series. Romney Brent as Cyril Beverly was the best thing in it.

The Importance of Being Earnest

Scenes from John Gielgud's recent brilliant
revival of Oscar Wilde's famous Comedy



Algernon: Please don't touch the cucumber sandwiches. They are ordered specially for Aunt Augusta.

Algernon Moncrieffe, young man about Town, entertains his friend, John Worthing, with rather scant hospitality at his rooms in Piccadilly. A scene near the opening of the play, showing Cyril Ritchard as Algernon and John Gielgud as John (alias Ernest).

LOOKING back over a year marked by an almost alarming number of revivals, John Gielgud's season of Wilde's exquisite piece of nonsense, which opened at the Phoenix on October 14th, stands apart as a glimpse of perfection rarely to be seen. It was, of course, the second war-time revival with almost the same cast, and throughout there was that sense of team work we have come to expect in any Gielgud production.

It seems a fitting opening to 1943 to pay tribute in these pages to 1942's most finished

and sparkling London production. We hope the coming year will bring equal artistic triumphs.

Meantime little remains to be said about the Wilde classic, except that the irresistible archness and mannerisms of those carefree days when blue blood was everything have an added appeal in these times of austerity, and the author's extravagant tilting at the society of his day comes over with a refreshing spontaneity and an unexpected modernity.

PICTURES BY JOHN VICKERS.



Algernon: No cucumbers!

Lane: No, sir. Not even for ready money.

Deering Wells as Lane and Edith Evans as Lady Bracknell, Algernon's awesome Aunt Augusta.



Gwendolen: My own Ernest. *Worthing*: But you don't really mean to say that you couldn't love me if my name wasn't Ernest?

Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies as the Hon. Gwendolen Fairfax, Lady Bracknell's daughter.



Lady Bracknell: Mr. Worthing! Rise, sir, from this semi-recumbent posture. It is most indecorous.

Lady Bracknell surprises "Ernest" in the art of proposing to Gwendolen.

Lady Bracknell: Where did this charitable gentleman who had a first class ticket for this seaside resort find you?

Worthing: In a hand-bag.

Lady Bracknell, cross-examining John Worthing as a prospective son-in-law, is horrified to discover he was a foundling, a social blemish not to be countenanced in spite of his flourishing finances. Meantime to add to his predicament John has been leading a "double" life, being "Ernest" in Town and the highly-esteemed John Worthing, J.P., at his home in the country.



The irrepressible Algeron, having discovered the country address of John Worthing, consults a railway time-table. John has just told him he has a charming ward, who is under the impression that "Ernest" is her guardian's wild younger brother.





Miss Prism: Cecily, Cecily! Surely such a utilitarian pursuit as watering the flowers is rather Moulton's duty than yours. Especially when intellectual pleasures await you.

Peggy Ashcroft as Cecily Cardew, John Worthing's ward, and Jean Cadell as the governess, Miss Prism, in the garden of Worthing's country home, Manor House, Woolton.



Chasuble: We might go as far as the schools and back.

Miss Prism: That would be delightful. Cecily, you will read your "Political Economy" in my absence.

J. H. Roberts as Canon Chasuble, much admired by Miss Prism.



Algernon: You are the prettiest girl I ever saw.

Algernon arrives, masquerading as "Ernest," and makes an immediate impression on the young romantic Cecily. Her shyness soon overcome John's ward and the bold young man make great headway, and it transpires that, like Gwendolen, Cecily prefers the name "Ernest" above all others.



All unaware of Algernon's perfidy, John Worthing makes his moving entrance in deep mourning, having determined to "kill off" his mythical brother who is now a source of embarrassment.



Chasuble: Your brother Ernest, dead?

Worthing: Quite dead.

John Worthing relates the story of his brother's untimely demise in Paris.

Below left:

Merriman (Charles Maunsell): Miss Fairfax.

Cecily: Pray let me introduce myself to you.
My name is Cecily Cardew.

Gwendolen pays a visit uninvited, and is none too pleased to find a young lady as attractive as Cecily at "Ernest's" country home.



Gwendolen: I had no idea there were any flowers in the country.

Cecily: Oh, flowers are as common here, Miss Fairfax, as people are in London.

The ladies' conversation over tea tends to asperity in a polite sort of way.

Worthing: How can you sit there, calmly eating muffins when we are in this horrible trouble, I can't make out.

Algernon: Well I can't eat muffins in an agitated manner. The butler would probably get on my cuffs.

John Worthing is justifiably annoyed with Algernon for his hand in the miserable affair of "Ernest."



Gwendolen: Let us go into the house. They will hardly venture to come after us there.

Gwendolen and Cecily, smarting under the knowledge of the deception practised upon them, retire into the house with great dignity.



Gwendolen: How absurd to talk of the equality of the sexes. Where questions of self-sacrifice are concerned men are infinitely beyond us.

Worthing: We are!

A battle of wits follows, but happily in the end the ladies are pleased to overlook the whole matter, even though the name of "Ernest" as a name meant so much to them.





Lady Bracknell: Cecily, you may kiss me.

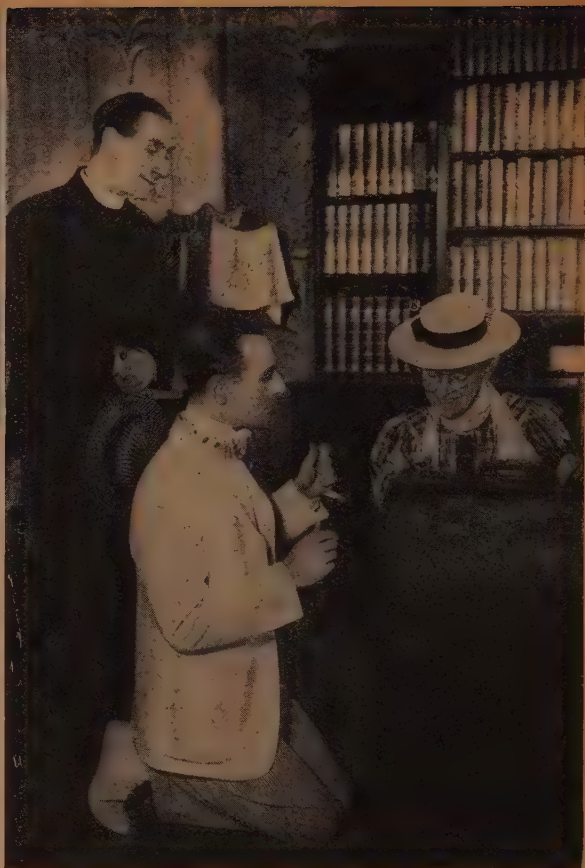
Cecily: Thank you, Lady Bracknell.

Lady Bracknell, arrived in pursuit of her erring daughter, is prevailed upon to give her blessing to her nephew's engagement to Cecily.

(*Right*):

Worthing: Is this the hand-bag, Miss Prism? Examine it carefully before you speak. The happiness of more than one life depends on your answer.

Miss Prism: It seems to be mine.



By an amazing coincidence it is discovered that Miss Prism it was who in an absent-minded moment left her charge in a hand-bag in Victoria Station cloakroom, wheeling home in the perambulator the MSS. that should have been in the bag. Thus John's identity is at last established, and he is proved to be none other than Algernon's elder brother—by name Ernest! Aunt Augusta is only too happy to contemplate so eligible a son-in-law.



(*Left*):

Dr. Chasuble: Laetitia!

Miss Prism: Frederick, at last!

The worthy Canon and Miss Prism share in the general happy lovers' endings that mark the close of this delicious comedy.

Sadler's Wells Ballet

THE RECENT SEASON
AT THE NEW THEATRE

**Reviewed by
Audrey Williamson**

MARY HONER

who will be much missed by followers of the ballet now that she has left the Sadler's Wells Company for the legitimate stage. The portrait shows her in *Coppelia*.



THE outstanding events in the Sadler's Wells Ballet season at the New Theatre were the revival of *The Rake's Progress* and the production of Robert Helpmann's new ballet, *The Birds*.

Essentially English

The Rake's Progress is a great ballet not only in the sense that it is artistically complete and vividly self-explanatory, but also because it remains the best example to date of a balletic style that is essentially English, a style that brings ballet back to the theatre where it traditionally belongs, and realises the special strength of the English dancer, the ability to mime and create character. The Hogarthian atmosphere of this ballet could have been reproduced in no other country; it has an 18th century gusto in which wit, satire, raffishness and stark horror are dramatically balanced, and in which every character is sharply etched. There are inspired details, among them the first picture of the Rake ringed with parasites and being measured, in dance, by the Tailor; the reluctance of the Betrayed Girl, half-petulant, half-sad, and the bristling vengeance of the Mother; the dance of the two drabs, prinking their hair with a ghastly coquetry; the gorgeously funny musicians and the way in which the Singer, succumbing to the temptations of the orgy, briskly gets rid of her two disapproving accompanists (John Field's trombonist is, one suspects, a prop of the local Evangelist band); the creditors impatiently taking

snuff astride their chairs; the witty balletic conception of the card game; the pitiful dance of the girl and the whole macabre pattern in the Lunatic scene. The choreographer is helped by Gavin Gordon's perfect score, which is magnificently danceable and dramatic, and by Rex Whistler's costumes and beautifully-drawn drop curtain.

The Company's Achievement

The young company rose to this production with a quite surprising assurance in characterisation and dance, Gordon Hamilton giving his neatest execution to date in Turner's original part of the Dancing Master. Ray Powell's Tailor, Franklin White's Jockey, Joy Newton's Singer and the drabs of Moyra Fraser and Celia Franca were also first-rate, and Mary Honer was lovely as the Girl, realising exactly where satire ends and true feeling begins, and giving to the last scene a wounded and wistful loyalty that was deeply touching. In the dance with the embroidery, perhaps Ninette de Valois' loveliest piece of choreography, her hands were exquisitely expressive. Leonardo da Vinci wrote "a face needs hands to give expression to the whole portrait," and watching this performance, and Helpmann's in the Card scene, one understood what he meant. Helpmann's *Rake* is a penetrating study in weakness and degeneracy, from a wittily naïve sowing of wild oats to the leering craftiness of the Card scene and the final desolation of the

(Continued overleaf)

Sadler's Wells Ballet (cont'd)

madhouse, in which even the outward glamour of rakedom is stripped bare, to reveal a creature broken, half-animal, yet pitiable in its hopelessness. Helpmann's acting in this scene—the nervous twitch of the face, the terrible trapped despair of the raw-rimmed eyes—is great acting in the widest sense of the term; it has a helpless pathos that makes one understand and accept the Girl's protective love for this battered and hardly human wreck.

Mary Honer's Last Season

The Girl was to prove almost Mary Honer's last part for the Wells. Swanhilda was the only other part she danced this season, and it was appropriate that *Coppelia* should be her last ballet, for her saucer-eyed mischief, as well as her brilliantly clean-cut technique, have made it adorably her own. Mary Honer has done seven years' sterling work for the Wells, ranging from demi-caractère parts like her Foolish Virgin, which plumbed depths of frivolous vacuity, to her dazzling *fouettés* in *Patineurs* which had a spontaneity and freedom unequalled in this company. The legitimate stage has regained a delicious comédienne and dancer and there is no blinking the fact that her leaving, on top of Harold Turner's, upsets the balance of the company, since Fonteyn and Helpmann are both romantic in style and ballets such as *Patineurs* need front-rank virtuoso dancers of a contrasting type. Performances of this ballet, as of *The Wanderer*, are unavoidably on the downgrade, though *The Wanderer* survives the better because its appeal is not merely technical but also emotional and metaphysical, and it retains the original moving performances of Helpmann and Julia Farron as well as the magnificent tingling vitality of Margot Fonteyn.

Helpmann's New Ballet

The company possesses, however, a refreshing quantity of young talent, unfinished but rapidly developing, and *The Birds* makes happy use of some of it. It is a jolly little comedy, a kind of *Wind in the Willows* of the ballet world, and came as a welcome light addition to the repertoire after an over-dose of *Façade*. Its chief value is a quite brilliant translation of bird movement into dance, from the grotesque pawing of the Hen, with its particularly funny burlesque *développé*, to the pert hop, run and *entre-chats* of the sparrows and the softer grace of the doves. The dancing is, moreover, all purely classical and a complete refutation of the criticism that Helpmann could only build a ballet round his own personality or in terms of dramatic mime. The little pas-de-deux for the sparrows are particularly original, being so created that

instead of dancing in unison one follows the other rather in the manner, in music, of a two-part catch or round. The same technique in the dance of the Dove and four Attendant Doves has, though, a slightly ragged effect both musically and pictorially; though there is a lovely standing pose, with foot tucked up and drooping head, that acts as a kind of dove *motif* throughout the ballet. The romantic pas-de-deux of the Nightingale and the Dove is dazzling technically and yet a lyrical interpretation of music and mood. It has lovely moments—a series of turns for the two dancers with a parallel diagonal sweep of the arms; a beautiful movement, perfectly expressing the murmuring undercurrent of the music, when the Dove circles round the slowly revolving Nightingale in grave kneeling poses with bowed head; a final exquisite picture of the two nestling together beneath folded wings, the Nightingale at this moment charmingly adopting the *motif* pose of her lover the Dove (the later pas-de-deux of the Cuckoo and the Hen is a clever burlesque of all this). Even the tragedy of the bird world is fleetingly touched on when the lovers, surprised by the Cuckoo, dart apart with quick alarmed movements of the head, and the Dove becomes instantly protective.

Promising Young Talent

These little timid head movements form an imaginative part of the dancing of the Nightingale, and her motion of hands cupped to lips, as well as the brilliance of her spins, express the joyousness of song. Beryl Grey gives this, her first created part, a shimmering iridescence and sweetness; it is a difficult virtuoso part requiring extremely careful partnering, and one wonders if Helpmann has not over-tried his dancers, since Alexis Rassiné is not strong as partner or as mime, with the result that his Dove, in the pas-de-deux, has neither the assurance nor the tender awakening to love one feels the dance demands. In other respects the Dove is well danced, for this young dancer has natural grace and a beautiful "line." The sparrows of Margaret Dale and Joan Sheldon have a choirboy innocence in mischief that is cheekily disarming, and Moyra Fraser, an over-tall dancer who has not always been too happily cast, scores a distinct success as the Hen, playing with a brilliant sense of burlesque and timing. The Chinese-fairy-tale décor and the music fit the ballet like a glove, and though one feels Helpmann's real importance as a choreographer lies in a dramatic and psychological direction, this little flight of fancy might very well hold its place in the repertoire.

The Sadler's Wells Opera Company is now at the New Theatre for a Christmas Season.



LESLEY OSMOND, of Windmill Theatre fame, is principal girl in Francis Laidler's *Mother Goose* at the Coliseum. Patricia Burke is principal boy with George Gee and Norman Evans also in the cast.



POLLY WARD, who is principal girl in Lupino Lane's Victoria Palace pantomime, *Babes in the Wood*.

The Season's Pantomimes

There are four pantomimes in the West End this year. In addition to those mentioned below Emile Littler's *Cinderella* is at the Stoll with Nervo and Knox, Fay Compton, Naughton and Gold and Ted Ray.



ARTHUR ASKEY, ARCHIE GLEN and EDDIE GRAY in Jack Hylton's *Jack and Jill* at His Majesty's. This pantomime, a brilliant success last year, is enjoying a welcome "revival" with the same stars, including Florence Desmond and Bryan Michie.

AS WE GO TO PRESS

ANOTHER big American success, Joseph Kesselring's comedy *Arsenic and Old Lace*, opened at the Strand on December 23rd, with Lillian Braithwaite, Frank Pettingell, Mary Jerrold, Nauntton Wayne, Edmund Willard and Martin Miller in the cast. The play is produced by Marcel Varnel.

* * *

LEE EPHRAIM'S plans for the New Year include productions of *The Vagabond King* (in association with Tom Arnold), and *Panama Hattie* and *Sunny River*, the American successes. Mr. Ephraim will also be associated (with Emile Littler and Bronson Albery) in presenting Paul Vincent Carroll's much-discussed play *Shadow and Substance*.

THIS year's production of *Peter Pan*, which Jack Hylton is presenting at the Winter Garden, has Ann Todd, Joyce Redman, Iris Hoey, Mark Daly and Alastair Sim in the cast.

QUIET WEEK-END, Esther McCracken's evergreen comedy, reached its 600th performance on December 28th.



Harlip

MARGARET JOHNSTON

who plays Jan in *Murder Without Crime*, the clever psychological thriller at the Comedy, which reached its 200th performance on December 23rd.

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EMLYN WILLIAM'S *The Morning Star* had achieved 473 performances when it recently finished its successful run at the Globe.

AFTER his return from his special visit to Gibraltar John Gielgud's first production will be Congreve's *Love for Love*.

JACK WALLER recently produced at Glasgow his musical comedy cavalcade *I Want to be Happy*, which after a provincial tour will come to Town with Wylie Watson at the head of a long cast.

THE International Ballet Company are back in Town for another London season, this time at the Piccadilly Theatre.

MELODRAMA is coming back to favour, or perhaps we should say burlesque. Following *Maria Marten* at the Arts, the Orpheum, Golders Green, has produced *The Streets of London*, and Jack Buchanan is to present *East Lynne* in the near future.

AMATEUR STAGE

Notes and Topics

DECEMBER'S revival of the demand for the Sunday opening of theatres reached the House of Commons. Those in favour of this concession would do well to remember one of Mr. Herbert Morrison's remarks, to the effect that on the previous debate this year to an open vote, the theatrical profession itself showed little sign of activity. The result was a defeat on a free vote by a narrow margin, the excellent campaigning and lobbying of the opponents to Sunday opening yielding them a merited victory. There is no escaping the conclusion that if the theatre is to receive fair play with the cinema, then the theatre itself must lead the virile organisation of that substantial section of the public in its favour.

TOYNBEE Hall Theatre drama festival closed with these four finalists. Student Movement Players in *A Husband for Breakfast*; Brook Green Players in *The Late Christopher Bean (Act I)*; St. Mildred's Clerks in *Arms and the Man (Act III)*; Mary Ward Players in *The Bear*. Mr. Norman Marshall gave an adjudicatory comment, and Dr. Mallon presented to each group's producer an order on the British Drama League's bookshop for a supply of textbooks of their own choice to assist them in their dramatic work.

The second session of this writer's festival at Toynbee Hall will run from January 23rd to February 20th, performances at 3 p.m. on each Saturday afternoon. Mr. Maxwell Wray will be the adjudicator, and an impressive selection of entries have been received. The popularity of this festival is testimony to a great revival of amateur work in the London district.

WALTZ *Without End*, now running at the Lyric Theatre, may be considered a possibility for future amateur use. It is a musical "make-believe" based on Chopin, showing that musical genius receiving the same treatment as others of his kind in recent years—love and marriage sacrificed to his art. The professional production has two factors not so easy for amateurs. There is quite an amount of ballet dancing, of a high order. And the scenery is heavy, seven settings, the last one being a cathedral interior of very short duration. With settings simplified, and more choral numbers in place of ballet, *Waltz Without End* may

at a later date be brought within amateur scope.

SPEAKING at the annual meeting of the British Drama League early in December, Lord Esher had something to say on a civic theatre for Britain after the war. It was felt, he said, that the old method of running the theatre in this country, which depended upon a fat cheque from the rich, was unlikely to be carried on after the war, for the rich would then no longer exist. The only alternative source of finance was obviously the State. People in this country looked with some suspicion on the activities of the State. He himself felt strongly that anything like a Minister of the Fine Arts would be disastrous, because one could not get really live and satisfactory art run by Civil servants in Whitehall. Therefore they looked forward to the usual English compromise, and had already created the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts, which was nominally under

(Continued overleaf)

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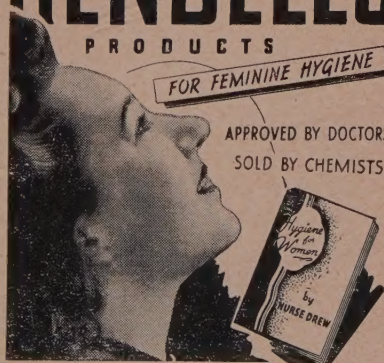
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